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ROLE OF THE TRADE-UNIONS
IN SOVIET ZONE OF GERMANY

Herbert Warnke

At present, 8 percent of all German industrial enterprises in the Soviet Zone are nationalized. They account for 45 percent of the zone's industrial production and include also the nationalized agricultural estates.

At the same time, the part of industry which turns out 55 percent of all production and almost all the wholesale businesses are in private hands and operate on capitalistic principles. Alongside them, there are small business home craft, and handicraft, enterprises. In the villages, the wealthy peasantry stands out in opposition to the workers, i.e., the small and middle peasants. Because of this variegated social and economic set-up, the trade-unions cannot pursue an effective policy based on uniform principles and, therefore, are faced with many types of problems. Consequently, the basic line adopted by the unions is deliberate and consistent cooperation in the fulfillment of the economic plan since such cooperation alone can guarantee an improvement in the workers' living conditions. In this connection, Marshall Sokolovsky's now well-known directive No 234 underscored the importance of increasing labor productivity and gave impetus to the activist (shock-workers') movement in many of the nationalized enterprises.

Participation by the trade-unions in the rehabilitation and development of the national economy of the Soviet Zone is assured through their representation in the German Economic Commission, which guides the zone's economy and in the supervisory organs of the nationalized banks, as well as through the activity of the union committees in all enterprises, since these bodies have a voice in decisions on social, political, and production matters. Thus, the trade-unions in the Soviet Zone have rights which they never enjoyed in Germany before.

All this is the exact opposite of what is happening in the Western zones, which have never implemented the Potsdam Agreement concerning the elimination of monopolies and land reform.

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In the Soviet Zone, the entire economy operates on the basis of the Two-Year Plan (1949 - 1950). The latter provides for an increase of 35 percent in industrial production by the end of 1950 and an increase of 10 percent in the 1949 crops, as well as an increase in livestock. This ought to make it possible to improve supplies and, simultaneously, to raise wages by 15 percent.

The fulfillment of the Two-Year Plan depends, above all, on the work of the nationalized enterprises inasmuch as they constitute the most important branches of production and turn out the more significant and greater part of production: 99.5 percent in the mining industry, 93.9 percent in the metallurgical industry, 44.5 percent in the paper and cellulose industry, and 40.8 percent in the machine-building industry. In the textile industry, nationalized enterprises turn out only 31.7 percent, in the food industry only 13.6 percent, and in the cosmetics industry only 6.5 percent. It is quite natural that the trade-unions should give special attention to the nationalized enterprises and should foster therein a new attitude toward labor. It is on this basis that the trade-unions work hand in hand with the plant administrations (more than 50 percent of their directors are former workers) toward fulfilling the Two-Year Plan.

The activist movement began toward the end of 1947. In 1948, a coal miner named Henneke fulfilled his daily norm 380 percent. After this feat, the activist movement quickly spread among the miners and other workers.

The trade-unions champion the practice of piece-rate pay. In 1947, only 20 percent of the workers were paid in this manner; now, the number is 37 percent. Plans are under way to extend this system in order to increase productivity and to give the workers a chance to earn more. The trade-unions have also been instrumental in obtaining equal pay for women and young people.

In addition, the trade-unions are faced with the problem of exerting their influence in private enterprises. The latter are not affected by the Two-Year Plan, except that private enterprises may enter into agreements with nationalized enterprises, and, to that extent, be included within the plan. They may then receive directives in connection with plan fulfillment and raw materials necessary to carry out these directives. The trade-unions in private enterprises see to it that agreements made with nationalized enterprises are carried out on time, check on the quality of the product, verify costs, and try to prevent use of the product for speculation. Their main task, of course, is to defend the workers' rights.

The Soviet Zone has a most advanced system of social legislation and service. Medical stations have been established in 1,600 plants. Thirty plants have polyclinics attached to them. Children's nurseries at plants have multiplied. The number of dining-rooms in plants has doubled during the past year and is now 6,357. The pride of the trade-unions are the rest centers.

At present, 17.8 million people, or 27 percent of the 66.5 million present day German population are living in the Soviet Zone. Of these people, 6 million are workers. Seventy six percent of all workers and employees in the zone belong to the free trade-unions. The Soviet Zone Federation of Free German Trade-Unions currently numbers 4.7 million, and with Berlin, 5.1 million members, or more than the number of members in all Germany in 1933.

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